

James McMillan School

615 S. West End Avenue

Local ✓ 7/13/99
State
State Marker
National



James McMillan School



Historic overview:

Augustus Burdeno purchased the land comprising the Del Ray community in 1850. Soon after he bought Zug Island from the Indians. People often sailed boats in this area, and began establishing businesses along the Detroit-Toledo Territorial Highway (West Jefferson Avenue). In 1860, large salt beds were found beneath Zug Island, and Del Ray began to change from a village to an industrial enclave. Between 1894-1905 Del Ray became home to many large manufacturers including Detroit Salt Company, Great Lakes Steel, and Detroit Iron Works.

The James McMillan School, a four-room school building, was opened in 1891 to serve Del Ray Township. In 1894, the building was destroyed by fire. A new 16 room, 2-story brick building was built upon the same site. The school and district were annexed to the Detroit Public School System in 1907, before which time McMillan had become a high school. McMillan reverted back to an elementary school in 1916. During the late 1990s a rallying effort by dedicated parents and teachers to keep the building open failed. The building remains closed and its future uncertain.

James McMillan was a prominent Detroit businessman, and was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1889. He was appointed chairman of the District of Columbia, and established the urban plan and park system. Reviving L'Enfant's plan for D.C., McMillan's plan became the nation's first comprehensive city plan and is credited with beginning the city planning movement in the U.S. He was also a philanthropist and donated \$200,000 to Grace Hospital, at the time it was the largest single contribution given to a hospital by an individual. McMillan also gave the University of Michigan one of the most complete Shakespearean libraries in the country.

